

AVERY SLOAN

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EDUCATION

Elon University 2025: Elon, NC | DIS fall 2023: Copenhagen, Denmark semester abroad
Major: Journalism | Minors: Leadership Studies and Political Science

Awards: 2024 Newspaper Pacemaker Winner, Associated Collegiate Press, 1st Place Liberty Awards for best election print edition in collegiate journalism, 1st Place Blog, ACP for 2022 midterm elections live blog

JOURNALISM EXPERIENCE

Elon News Network, Elon University, Elon, NC

Executive Director

May 2024 – Present

- Lead organizational communication, acting as the primary liaison between Elon News Network and the Elon community, including providing official statements and managing external relations.
- Oversee budget management and policy development, working with advisers and executive staff to ensure financial accountability and update organizational policies as needed.
- Direct recruitment, hiring and training initiatives, managing the onboarding process for new staff, coordinating outreach efforts and maintaining accurate organizational records across multiple platforms.

Managing Editor of The Pendulum

December 2023 - Present

- Determine what stories will fall into the newspaper each week, as well as placement of that content.
- Oversee the assignment of stories and photos so that the newspaper may be completed and published in an orderly manner by deadline.

Multimedia Reporter

August 2021 - Present

- Write weekly stories with a focus on solutions-based journalism and work that provides a service to both students and people living within the town of Elon and Alamance County.

Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, Washington, D.C.

2024 Reporting Fellow

July 2024

- Produced in-depth investigative reporting for three weeks on prison reform in Denmark by interviewing former incarcerated people, politicians, researchers and social organizations focused on criminal justice.

INDY Week, Durham, N.C.

Reporting Intern

May 2024 – August 2024

- Reported on topics ranging from third party candidates in the 2024 election, the second largest LGBTQ+ film festival in the Southeast and renovations to the childhood home of a civil rights activist and lawyer in Durham.
- Worked with editors to tell local stories with a focus on diversity and telling underreported stories.

WORK EXPERIENCE

Town of Elon, Elon, N.C.

Summer Intern

June 2022 – August 2022

- Helped organize files and create presentations for past and current rezoning and land use projects, including navigating the transition for a new system of zoning to be used in the town.

Moseley Student Center, Elon, N.C.

Student Employee

August 2022 – Current

- Work with a team of 50 other students to help students, parents and faculty members navigate campus and process events for student organizations.



'I'm not hiding out': Transitioning late in life

Chapel Hill resident embraces own identity after 60
years, adjust to new reality amid rollbacks on
transgender rights

By Avery Sloan | April 3, 2025

Crystal Burroughs knew she was meant to be a girl by the time she was 4 years old, before she knew what the word transgender meant. But even though she was sure of her identity from a young age, growing up in the 1960s and 70s without transgender representation and living through decades of normalized transphobia — she never planned to actually come out as a transgender woman.

From as early as elementary school, Burroughs would sneak into her mom's closet and crossdress. As a child, it was normal for her to hear her teachers and coaches calling students slurs and derogatory terms. She said growing up, she was constantly under this "umbrella of fear" that someone would figure out who she really was — so she never told anyone, even as a married adult, that she was transgender. For years, she would wait until her wife was out of town to wear makeup and women's dresses in her home.

"I intended to just hide it and just crossdress in private to satisfy that need," Burroughs said.

However, two years ago, her gender dysphoria was only getting worse, and Burroughs began drinking heavily to cope. Gender dysphoria is defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders as an incongruence between one's sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. To try and block out her identity, she decided she would buy a wig and makeup to see herself as a woman, and then that would be it, she would go back to fully dressing and living as a man. But, after feeling what it was like to be perceived as a woman and the gender euphoria that came along with it — she couldn't go back.

"My body went numb and I just felt like the weight of the world — I'll get emotional — came off my shoulders," Burroughs said.

In March 2023, when Burroughs was 60 years old, she came out as transgender, first just to her wife. Initially, she said she planned to only "make it a part time thing" and crossdress occasionally in public.

"The more I got out, I felt so wonderful to be out and myself, the desire to be fully transitioned and living full time that way — it was overwhelming," Burroughs said.

By the end of 2023, she said she decided to go on hormone replacement therapy and begin fully transitioning. Now, she is fully out as transgender to her job and larger community. At a state level, an estimated 0.9% of the adult population identifies as transgender, according to data from [UCLA school of law Williams Institute from 2022](#). As a Chapel Hill resident, she said she feels supported and safe in her local community.

"In Chapel Hill I can't walk down the street without running into another trans person," Burroughs said. "I mean it's that much, and people practically high-five you."



Yet at the national level, the conversation around transgender rights has become much more contentious. President Donald Trump has targeted transgender rights through a series of executive orders. His orders, while mostly still in limbo in court, specifically target groups including [transgender athletes in schools](#), [teenagers looking for gender affirming care](#) and [transgender people in prison](#).

The majority of U.S. adults favor or strongly favor certain laws and policies that restrict transgender people, according to a [study from February from the Pew Research Center](#). Sixty-six percent of survey respondents supported transgender athletes competing on teams matching their sex assigned at birth and 56% of survey respondents supported banning health care professionals from providing care related to gender transitions for minors.

But, at the same time 56% of adults expressed support for policies aimed at protecting transgender people from job, housing and public discrimination. Overall, the survey found Americans have become more supportive of restrictions for transgender people.

While older members of the transgender community are not as directly

affected with current executive orders, Burroughs said it is still a scary time to be transgender. Burroughs has lived through a period of transgender rights growing exponentially, yet said in recent months, the future feels more uncertain.

“The chance of violence against me, I think, has risen considerably,” Burroughs said.

Mortality rate of transgender people compared to cisgender people

A study published in Duke University Press using private insurance data from 2011 to 2019 found that transgender people on private insurance had higher mortality rates across nearly every age range.

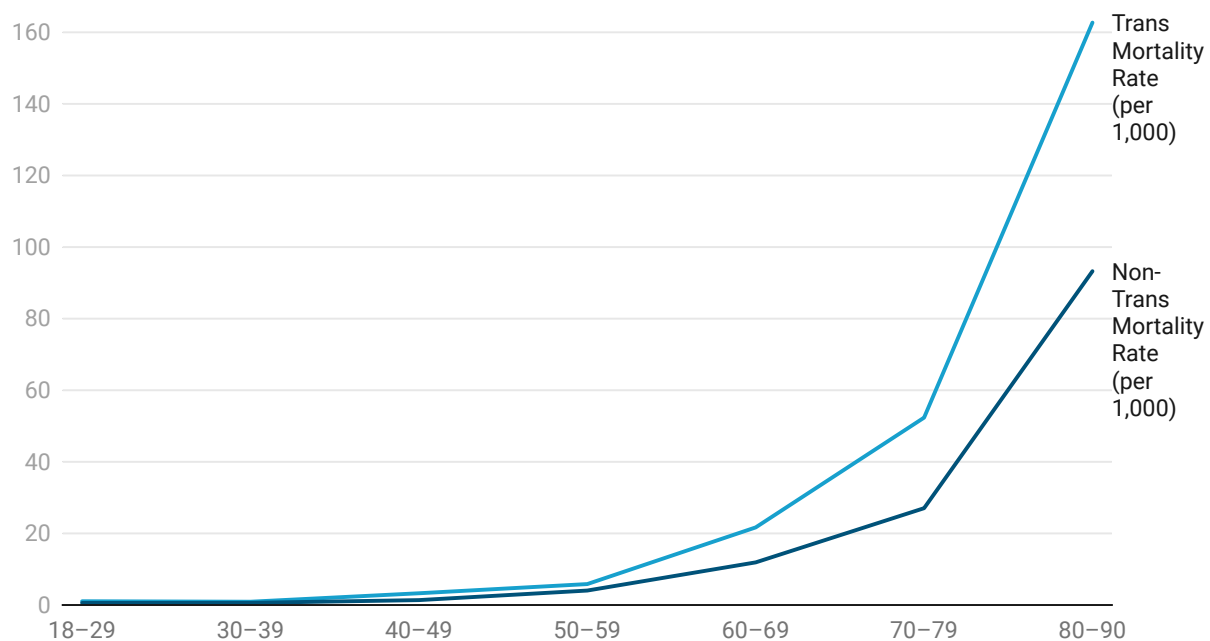


Chart: Avery Sloan • Source: [Duke University Press](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Burroughs is a member of Transcend Alamance, an organization with the goal of supporting members of the LGBTQ+ communities through support groups and programming. While Burroughs now has a larger community in the Chapel Hill and Carrboro area, she said this group was specifically helpful for her when she first came out.

Julie Tyson, a member of Transcend Alamance’s board of directors, has lived through an increase of rights for the LGBTQ+ communities. Yet, as a lesbian who has lived all over North Carolina, she said that recently she has noticed things have changed in certain ways.



Julie Tyson, board member at Transcend Alamance, sits in her home in front of her collection of pins and other memorabilia.

Tyson said she remembers hearing people yell slurs at her in the 1980s and she hasn't heard anything like that for 30 to 40 years. But, she said for the first time in many years she recently had someone come up to her in her car and harass her for the multitude of stickers she has that represent parts of her identity.

Tyson said despite that experience, what keeps her up at night is her concern for younger members of the LGBTQ+ communities. Tears welled in her eyes as she recounted her own experience growing up knowing at a young age that she was a lesbian and feeling loneliness and anger at the world. As an adult, knowing children are feeling those same emotions and seeing their own rights discussed in the news — she is at a loss for words.

"I go to work in the morning and I do what I do," Tyson said. "I go to work and I pet sit and I take care of my mom and I'm a raging machine of anger at the same time. I am absolutely infuriated."



Julie Tyson's collection of memorabilia she keeps on her desk, including pins and photographs, highlight her identity and beliefs.

Burroughs has found her safe haven within her local community, with both formal events meant for members of the LGBTQ+ communities and informal social events, such as comedy shows and open mic events.

Burroughs, who has been a musician her whole life, performed at an open mic night for the first time on March 10 at Carrboro Speakeasy. The speakeasy is a place she has been able to find community in since coming out.

She said finding community and living her authentic life is worth everything she has lost. Last month, Burroughs and her wife separated after 32 years of marriage.

Burroughs said she thought the separation was due to the physical changes from her hormonal replacement therapy, but she still has no regrets about coming out. She said she has found the majority of her friends and family members were more supportive than she could have ever hoped, even those whom she grew up with and known long before her transition.

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Tony Sharpe said he and Burroughs became close friends from a young age from riding the same school bus and pulling pranks together in the same Boy Scout troop. Even now, as adults living in different states, they have stayed friends. Sharpe was one of the first people Burroughs came out as transgender to, Burroughs said.

“It didn’t matter to me, we’ve been friends for so long,” Sharpe said. “It’s like I said then, if you’ve known this and had this feeling since you were 5 and I’ve known you our whole lives, there’s nothing different about our friendship.”

Generational divides with seeking gender affirming care

Average number of years it took each age group from when they first started feeling gender dysphoria to undergoing gender transition



Chart: Avery Siose • Source: NIH National Library of Medicine • Get the data • Created with Datowraper

Sharpe said in the moment he was just initially surprised that there was something this big about Burrough’s identity which he never knew about — but that it didn’t change their friendship.

Despite her identity resulting in the end of her marriage and political concerns, Burroughs said after 60 years of keeping this part of her identity hidden, she isn’t afraid to express who she is anymore.

Burroughs said it's been scary to see how quickly executive orders restricting rights of transgender people and other members of the LGBTQ+ communities have been written. Burroughs said she disagrees politically with the majority of what the Trump administration stands for and is worried for her friends who are struggling to refill hormone therapy medicine on Medicare insurance and other younger members of the LGBTQ+ communities who might struggle to receive gender affirming care. But, Burroughs said while she is nervous thinking about what the future of transgender rights in the U.S. might look like, she is prideful of her identity and secure in her local community.

"I'm not hiding out, I'll go down fighting," Burroughs said.

Latest

NEWS | 05/19/2025 10:52am

The revival of downtown Gibsonville: how locals are rebuilding a thriving Main Street

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NEWS | 05/18/2025 5:23pm

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Elon partners with Occaneechi Tribe for language revitalization course

Powwow runs Oct. 12, 13; professor creates new language course

By [Avery Sloan](#) | 10/6/24 2:31pm



The Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation holds a Powwow each year on its tribal grounds. Last year, the tribe had close to 5,000 people attend the event. Photo credit: obsn.org.

The Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation has been what Tribal Chairman Tony Hayes considers a well kept secret within Alamance and Orange counties — something he is hoping is changing.



In two weeks, Oct. 12 and 13, the tribe will host a Powwow, the Occaneechi’s largest event of the year, Hayes said. The tribe is expecting between 5,000 and 10,000 people in attendance, depending on the weather, and Hayes said in most years there have been about 6,000 people — many of them non-tribal members.

“Lots of people aren’t aware that powwows are really for, primarily for non Indians, because obviously the Indians that we have there already understand our culture and our nature and the things that we do and our social skills,” Hayes said.

At the powwow, Corey Roberts, professor of Native American and Indigenous studies, will be running a language table for the Occaneechi language Yesa:sahj, featuring a board game he created,

SPORTS | 05/17/2025 5:50pm

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LIFESTYLE | 05/15/2025 3:31pm

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LIFESTYLE | 05/14/2025 9:07am

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incorporating the language, along with other games such as blackjack and Rock, Paper, Scissors, all also taught in Yesa:sahj.

Yesa:sahj a once fully spoken language, only had 753 words left in it as of 2018. Now, Roberts, one of the most fluent people in the language, has been working to revitalize the language — and is bringing the language to Elon beginning in winter term class.

Roberts did not know he was Indigenous until his father died in 2017. After that, he and his cousins began looking into their geneology, discovering their grandmother's side was Occaneechi, a tribe located primarily in Little Texas, Pleasant Grove Township and Alamance County, while other members of his family were Tuscarora, an Indigenous tribe from northeastern Canada and the U.S.

Roberts then said he wanted to learn more about his culture without being intrusive so figured he would start by learning the language. He then realized this would not be a simple task because of what little was left of the language.

"I decided I'm going to throw my efforts into helping the language come back," Roberts said. "It's not me single handedly, there have been people working on it for decades, but I've been able to get a level of linguistics training that's been really helpful in this process, and I'm really thankful that I'm able to get back to the various members of the language community."

Roberts' language class will look different from other languages taught at Elon for a number of reasons. A main difference is that class will be open to community members, of any age, who do not attend Elon. This class is not something Roberts wanted to do without the help and support of the local community and throughout the entire language revitalization process, Roberts has included and relied on members of the Occaneechi Tribe. While other universities have worked on language revitalization efforts before, Roberts said this class at Elon is not something he's seen done before.

"Setting out in conjunction with the university to enlist the help of the students, while learning the language, to also help build the structure of the language and work in conjunction with tribal members — I'm hoping that that is a positive and unique experience for everyone," Roberts said.

The class won't be free for community members, Roberts said. He decided to charge \$20 for the class, but the money will go to the tribal nation, not to Elon.

There have been previous classes focusing on aspects of Native American culture, including Native American literature, which Paula Patch, professor of English, is teaching this semester. She said Elon and the Office of Inclusive Excellence have prioritized education and programming on Native American history and culture, because students wanted the university to do so.

“Native American Student Association asked for it,” Patch said. “Those of us who are allies of that organization and those students have also asked for it, and, and this was one of those places where people at Elon said, ‘Yeah, that sounds like a good idea, and we’ve really been able to run with it and expand on it.’”

Patch is also the adviser for NASA, something she said she came into naturally because of her interest and previous knowledge of Native American culture. Patch got her master’s degree at Eastern New Mexico University and said Native American literature was included in its coursework, because of the large amount of Native history and current tribes in the state. Patch also grew up in North Carolina, another state with a large Native population, and said she grew up learning about Native history and throughout her education and then teaching, has focused on Native American culture. She said she always included Native American authors in her classes and whenever the opportunity arose, she has listened to Native speakers.

She also said as she is not Native herself, it is important for her to make sure the books and videos she includes in her classes are mostly authored by Natives, to help provide a more authentic perspective.

“There’s some ways in which having a white woman teach Native American literature, still means that we’re sort of colonizing that space, in a way, and so I just see myself as the steward of the space,” Patch said. “If we were to get somebody who’s doing scholarship, someone who was Native American or indigenous identified, and they’re doing really cool work in Native American literature, would gladly seed my course.”

There is also some debate within the Indigenous community surrounding who should learn Indigenous languages, something Roberts is aware of as he prepares to teach this course.

“I’ve had people who are not from any tribal communities, not native, say to me, ‘Well, I believe this language should be available to everybody,’” Roberts said. “And I’m like, ‘Well, of course you would.’”

Roberts said he encourages students to sign-up and is hoping the class has many students but also wants to make sure the class teaches Yesa:sahj in a holistic and respectful manner.

“Depending on how the numbers work out, you may have a lot of Elon students, not tribal members, learning the language more and more in depth than the tribal members actually know,” Roberts said. “That’s a sensitive point, because I don’t want people to go into a tribal situation and say, ‘Well, I can speak your language. Why can’t you speak it?’”

Right now, Roberts said students are likely largely unaware of the class being offered. This is something he is hoping to change, he said. He also is hoping to appeal to students in a different way than in a typical language course, as the real-world applications for Yesa:sahj differ.

“Because I’m a linguist, I point out things comparatively so taking this class will actually also help you to understand more about language period and help you learn more about language in general,” Roberts said.

Despite there being no Occaneechi students at Elon, according to Roberts, staff members at Elon have been working to invest in their relationship with the Occaneechi Tribe, and the tribal leaders are working to partner with the university more.

“I think most people have this rubber stamp of what it is to be an Indian,” Hayes said. “All tribes are very, very different, and they have different habits and base and different geographies, so really, just more of a shared fellowship and a cultural experience that I think people really don’t understand, because most people think, ‘Well, you’ve seen one Indian, you’ve seen them all.’ — and that’s not necessarily the case.”

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NEWS | 05/19/2025 10:52am

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ABSS grapples with staff shortages, prioritizing budget

Alamance County has 30-35 vacant bus driver positions

By [Avery Sloan](#) | 3/12/25 3:08pm



The Alamance-Burlington School System is currently facing a shortage of bus drivers, causing some buses to do multiple routes. ENN File Photo.

Updated as of 10:34 p.m. on March 12 to include video.



Social studies teacher at Williams High School Robert Alvis said he has one student arrive 30 minutes late every day and another 10 minutes late because of a bus driver shortage in the county. Certain bus routes in the Alamance-Burlington School System for students who live further away from their schools have to make stops at multiple schools in the mornings, leading to students arriving late every day for class.

“There’s just literally nothing we can do to get them to school by the time the class starts,” Alvis said. “That is the amount of drivers we have, and there’s other students in other classes who have routinely the same problems.”

There are between 30 and 35 open positions for bus drivers in the county, Chad Aharon, ABSS driver’s education coordinator, said. But, this is not just a problem unique to Alamance County; school districts across the state and country are facing similar challenges. As of September 2024, there were 12.2% fewer school bus drivers on the road than September 2019, according to data from the Economic

SPORTS | 05/17/2025 5:50pm

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LIFESTYLE | 05/15/2025 3:31pm

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Policy Institute. Aharon said it is difficult for the district to compete with other higher paying roles when ABSS bus drivers are making between \$17 and \$18 an hour to drive a bus route and handle discipline issues on buses.

“It’s just like anything else in a capitalistic society, if you don’t pay for the work, then you’re not going to get a lot of people,” Aharon said.

ENN Tonight | Alamance Burlington School System sta...



The bus driver shortage in ABSS has grown since the COVID-19 pandemic, with more bus drivers choosing to retire, Aharon said. This can be a larger problem in some weeks for the county when multiple drivers call out sick, Aharon said.

Now, a year after Alamance County faced a [mold crisis](#) affecting 32 out of 36 schools and costing the county [millions of dollars](#) — the board of education is figuring out how to balance the 2025-26 budget. At the [Feb. 24 board meeting](#), ABSS chief finance officer Tony Messer presented the proposed budget, which included increased supplemental pay and employee benefits for certified staff members.

Messer also presented a payment model for increasing pay for classified employees, after community support and previous conversations at board meetings. Certified employees include staff members such as teachers and administrators, whereas classified employees include bus drivers and education support specialists — or employees that do not require specific certifications in order to get hired. The proposal was a 46% increase from the current budget.

This also comes amid additional changes within the ABSS board of education after an announcement at the Feb. 24 meeting from board member Chuck Marsh, saying he is stepping down from his position. The board has yet to announce how it will select a new board member.

Alvis said he feels that all staff members should be prioritized within ABSS, as classified members help the schools function in many ways, including the school’s receptionist, who takes all parent calls and greets students each morning, child nutrition workers, teacher’s assistants and data managers.

Due to the budget constraints of last year, there was also a reduction in force across the county where several positions were eliminated. Alvis said one thing he liked about the proposed budget is that it reinstated some of those positions. Due to the reduction in force at Williams High School, Alvis said last year the school started with four assistant principals but ended the year with two.

“You can imagine how much of a struggle that was to try and run with half of the normal positions eliminated,” Alvis said.

There used to be a full-time user coordinator for the school library, but now that position is shared with Williams Middle School. The position of library coordinator was also already filling multiple roles as it handled maintaining the library itself, keeping track of and distributing Chromebooks to students and staff, and maintaining technology across the library.

“He’s here for half today at middle school for half the day, so for half the day when our students need to use the library or they have a computer issue that they need to go and get fixed. It’s, ‘Sorry, he’s in the middle school,’” Alvis said. “You already had individuals who were stretched pretty thin, but then you stretch them across two different schools as well.”

ABSS Board of Education member [Seneca Rogers](#) said many of the employee supplements, for both certified and classified employees, were things that the board had discussed previously, but due to the mold crisis were pushed back. Rogers said that budget constraints of the time made for hard decisions on what positions were cut.

“I can’t say any of those positions were not needed. I feel like all of, all of, the positions, all of the things that was done then, was all needed things,” Rogers said. “And even now, if you visit some of our schools and talking to principals, teachers, even some of the parents, they’ll tell you how they wish that that did not have to go on.”

Rogers said while the board does have multiple priorities within its budget, supporting classified staff members, including bus drivers, has been a topic of discussion for the board for a long time and is something he feels is important.

“We need to be discussing it and trying to figure out what can be done from a district point of view, to try to help fill as many of those vacancies as we can as possible,” Rogers said.

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Immigrants in Alamance County adjust to evolving policies

Community reacts to federal immigration changes, reflects on past racial profiling

By [Avery Sloan](#) | 2/12/25 11:45am



Some states have issued guidances for schools in connection with how to respond to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials. (ICE Office/TNS)

Blanca Nienhaus, a Graham resident and Mexican immigrant, said she comes from a country where people traditionally are afraid of the police. When she came to the U.S., she did not think the same thing would be true. Yet both herself and other immigrants she knows, despite having documentation, have faced instances around the police where they have been worried for their safety.



One day, Nienhaus was driving home and decided to take a new route through an unfamiliar neighborhood. A police car saw her pull in and started following her, continuing until she pulled into her own driveway of her house. Despite this experience, Nienhaus has continued to use her ability to speak both English and Spanish, her connection to the community and her American citizenship to help advocate for immigrant rights.

“I became part of a minority, which is easy to say, but not easy to live,” Nienhaus said. “People heard that I spoke English, ... people started coming to me and asking me things or asking for help or for giving information. So I was able to have each foot on one side of the coin.”

SPORTS | 05/17/2025 5:50pm

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Nienhaus is a member of Fairness Alamance — an organization that was created in response to racial profiling from the Alamance County's sheriff department to provide support to immigrants. In Dec. 2012, the U.S. Department of Justice sued the sheriff's department for illegally targeting Latino drivers, and Fairness Alamance played a large role in helping provide the DOJ evidence.

Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson said the sheriff's department has had a contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement since 2007 and has been holding ICE detainees in the county jail since 2012. In 2022, ICE released a press release saying it would no longer use the county's detention facility for long-term detention, only short periods of custody if it meets applicable standards. This was because of concerns about conditions in the facility. The ACLU of North Carolina released a statement in response to this stating that the detention center for years has raised concerns for them due to its "horrific conditions, reports of abuse, and serious medical neglect at the Alamance County jail."

This January, the county's contract with ICE ended and is being renegotiated now, Johnson said.

Not knowing what is coming next is part of what Nienhaus said is anxiety provoking.

"People are scared because of the previous experience and because there are lots of uncertainty, nothing for sure so far," Nienhaus said. "But people are afraid."

Nienhaus said in Alamance County, she is used to a sheriff who has been openly against immigration, yet seeing immigration constantly in the federal news is newer. President Donald Trump campaigned on the promise of increased deportations.

In the less than 30 days Trump has been in office, Trump has tried to pass an executive order to block citizenship for children in the U.S. born to undocumented immigrants and has significantly increased ICE enforcement — arresting 7,400 people in nine days, according to ICE's X account.

Johnson, who has been a partner with ICE for over 10 years, has previously agreed to give ICE 40 out of 346 beds at the detention center, Johnson said. While negotiations are still underway, Johnson said if ICE requests more bed space he could likely provide space at the old county prison unit.

Despite the lawsuit for racial profiling in 2012, Johnson said any immigrants who do not have a criminal record should have no cause for concern. Johnson said this is the current federal government's policy and is what the county follows.

"There will be no racial profiling by the Alamance County sheriff's office," Johnson said.

Even if immigrants with no criminal record are not the target of the department, getting pulled over or being stopped by a police officer in

general can be a nerve racking experience — even with campaigns such as “know your rights,” where people are told to remain silent and wait for a lawyer, Nienhaus said this is easier said than done.

“People get scared,” Nienhaus said. “It is not the same reading in a paper. If somebody, if a police, knocks at your door, ... it’s easy to say, but when the people are living in that situation, they just freak out.”

Over ten years ago, the lawsuit against the sheriff’s department was on law 287g — a law that allowed local law enforcement to begin deportation proceedings, not just federal ICE agents. The county settled this case as it was found the sheriff’s department was using this law as a reason to specifically target the Latino and Hispanic communities.

The department signed an agreement that it would accept the monitoring of the DOJ and commit itself to best practices. Nienhaus said since this lawsuit she does feel like things have improved a little bit as this lawsuit helped bring attention to instances of racial profiling in the county.

“More people were focused on what they were doing, then they were not,” Nienhaus said. “And little by little, I think things began to calm down.”

For sophomore Edward Hernandez, racial profiling in Alamance County has been a longstanding issue. Hernandez, who grew up in Burlington, said he has had people call him slurs for speaking Spanish in public with his family.

“Even before politics, just in the state of the county we’ve lived in, that Elon is, it’s always been just a thought,” Hernandez said. “It’s not something that it’s always talked about, but it’s always something that’s in the back of our heads.”

Hernandez is the president of Elon’s Latinx Hispanic Union and said some of the goals of the organization is to showcase Hispanic culture, educate others and provide a safe space for members of the Latino and Hispanic communities.

Hernandez said as an organization he feels supported by Elon to be able to have both physical spaces to meet and funding for events, but he would like to see some kind of formal statement from the university on where it stands regarding federal news surrounding immigration.

“From what I’ve heard, Elon hasn’t made any comments or anything specifically, to quote, unquote, support,” Hernandez said. “They’ve just consisted with their general SGA funding, generally giving us spaces to have our events. ... that may not be explicitly on the nose for politics, but do bring support to the communities on campus, nothing really has changed.”
